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Mondale and Ferraro Intensify Criticism Of Reagan, Emphasizing Foreign Policy

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark.—Walter Mondale and Geraldine Ferraro are stepping up their assaults on Ronald Reagan, especially through attacks on his foreign policy.

This week, Mr. Mondale charged that the recent American Embassy bombing in East Beirut was "inexcusable," alleging that the president "has not mastered what he must know to command his own government." In the same vein, yesterday he spoke of a "remote presidency that is not attentive to essential detail" on such complicated issues as arms control.

Similarly, Ms. Ferraro persistently criticized the president's conduct of foreign policy yesterday, making caustic comments about the embassy bombing in a speech at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. She said Mr. Reagan's failure to take blame for the disaster was "disgraceful," asserting: "A new issue has arisen in this campaign—the leadership of Ronald Reagan."

Mr. Reagan, meanwhile, sought to close the books on the embassy incident. He told reporters in Brownsville, Texas: "We've had an investigation. There was no evidence of any carelessness or anyone not performing their duty." Asked whether he considers the case closed, he said, "Yes." The president said he accepts responsibility for the presence and policy of the U.S. in Lebanon. "I was responsible and no one else," he said. Earlier, he had suggested that previous cutbacks in intelligence gathering were partly to blame.

Mondale advisers say the campaign's emphasis on foreign policy has emerged from the international events themselves rather than from the drafting boards of political strategists. "It's not a strategy shift," says John Reilly, a close Mondale adviser. "Events have pushed us that way."

Campaign's Major Themes

Even so, the Democratic presidential candidate has taken positions he developed throughout this year and has grafted sharper language to them, sometimes even going to the brink of attacking President Reagan personally. Yesterday, before flying here to speak to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, Mr. Mondale charged that the president's record "raises a question of how we can possibly manage

the arms-control and security functions of our government, and command a government within which there are deep differences, if he himself is not sufficiently in control of the facts."

This line of argument is the culmination of the major themes of Mr. Mondale's campaign: the charge that Mr. Reagan isn't committed to arms control and the attempt to portray Mr. Reagan as an insulated leader.

The president "dreams the same dreams that we do," he said of his rival at a rally in New Brunswick, N.J., on Monday. "But a president must also master, command, learn and lead. You can dream all you want, but if you believe that nuclear weapons can be recalled after they're launched—as Mr. Reagan did—you won't lead us toward a safer world."

Arms Control, Lebanon Crisis

The Democratic nominee is trying to attack Mr. Reagan's policies without assailing the president himself. "There's always a tough line to tread as to whether you're attacking President Reagan," said Mr. Reilly. "We don't want to do that. A lot of people think he's a good leader."

Ms. Ferraro also is zeroing in on President Reagan's record on arms control and in handling the crisis in Lebanon. At Vanderbilt, she was so negative that she felt compelled near the end to depart from her text to say, "I'm not only asking you to vote against Ronald Reagan" but also to vote for Walter Mondale.

Ms. Ferraro, both in that speech and earlier at an auto plant in Illinois, saved her sharpest attacks for the president's failure to prevent three explosions at U.S. outposts in Beirut over the past 17 months. "The first incident was a tragedy," the Democratic vice presidential candidate said. "The second showed neglect. And the third was a disgrace." She charged that Mr. Reagan showed "gall" by trying to blame the latest Beirut bombing on intelligence cutbacks by previous administrations. In contrast, she said, President Kennedy "blamed himself for the Bay of Pigs disaster. And that was the last mistake he made."

Mondale advisers say the candidate will continue to emphasize foreign policy questions, particularly at the second debate, which is scheduled for Oct. 21 and will cover diplomatic issues.

Neither Democratic candidate, of course, is confining criticism of the president exclusively to foreign issues. In his remarks to the rural electric group here, Mr. Mondale noted that an average of 1,000 Arkansas farm families have lost their farms each year under the Reagan administration. And while emphasizing economic issues to auto workers yesterday, Ms. Ferraro took the unusual step of asking "why one-third of you are going to vote for Ronald Reagan." She then debated some of the workers over their reasons for supporting the Republican ticket.